

FACTORS AFFECTING  
THE AUSTRALIAN POSITION  
IN INTERNATIONAL FASHION DESIGN

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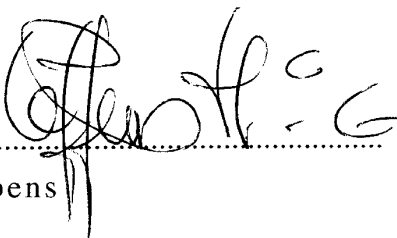
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Design,  
Architecture and Building, University of Technology, Sydney,  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Sydney, 2000

## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

.....  
Mieke Leppens



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My supervisor Associate Professor Peter van Sommers gave me the education I was looking for. His depth and breadth of knowledge has been a constant inspiration for which I am most grateful. Apart from his intellectual guidance I thank him for his dependable support. There are many who assisted me in my search for relevant material but I would like to thank University librarian Joy Slater especially, for finding so many relevant works and for taking such an interest in my research. For the same reasons I also thank Peter Kreitals, Norma Martyn, Michael Agiapitos, Paul Rider and George Hardwick. I acknowledge the advice given me by statistician Narelle Smith, Department of Mathematics, UTS, for which I am most grateful. I also thank my colleagues and post-graduate friends at UTS, especially Jacqueline and those in the Fashion and Textile Department: Eric Hagen, Rhys Cumpstone and Maureen Lazarus and many students for endless discussion and debate which has been most productive for me. I thank the interviewees for their insights and for their candour.

In Australia I was granted access to the David Jones Archives, the Wool Board Library (Melbourne) and the Costume Collection at the Australian National Gallery (Canberra). While completing research for this thesis a small study (Leppens, 1996) was supported by the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development.

In France I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends Helen and Daniel Marguerie who on a number of occasions gave me a beautiful place to stay during my research visits to Paris. In Paris many people gave me valuable time but I am especially obliged to Françoise Benhamou, Denise Dubois, *La Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, Paris*; Marie-Paul Nedjar from the School at the CSCP; Lydia Kamitsis, Curator of the Musée de la Mode at the Louvre; Marie-Andrée Jouve, Curator of the Balenciaga Archives; Li Edelkoort, Trend Union fashion forecasting agency and Suzy Menkes.

In Belgium my thanks go to: Gerdi Esch at The Flanders Fashion Institute, Linda Loppa from the *Academie van Antwerpen*, Franc Pairon at the *Ecole Nationales Supérieure des Arts de la Cambre*. The Belgian Consulate in Sydney was resourceful in important ways.

I am especially grateful to Shane McEvey for his constant support and patience, for keeping chaos at bay, but especially for providing me with trips to the desert, saneness and melrose.

*For Aristotle, to understand a thing was to know its essence, or to define it. And definition was not of names, but of essences; concepts were “real”, their essences were identified with this reality, and the truth could be reached through precise definition. A true system of knowledge thus became essentially a classification scheme, or an ability to relegate things to explicitly delimited categories*

(Ghiselin, 1969)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CPI	<i>Code de la Propriété Intellectuelle</i> [= common intellectual property law]
CSCP	<i>La Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne</i>
DISR	Department of Industry, Science and Resources
DJ	David Jones department stores, Australia
FIA	Fashion Industries of Australia
GMC	Groupement Mode & Creation
IFM	<i>Institute Français de la Mode</i> , a school established by Bergé & Grumbach
TCF	Textile, Clothing and Footwear industries
TCFADA	TCF of Australia Development Authority
TCFC	Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council
TCFL	Textile, Clothing, Footwear and Leather Industries
TFIA	Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia

## ABSTRACT

Success in fashion design is important both in its own right and because it has positive influences on the culture of a country and because of the favourable ramifications it can have across many unrelated industries. This dissertation investigates the Australian fashion design industry and asks whether there is a place for a semi-autonomous industry regulator of the kind found in other countries.

France is a natural choice as a model because on the one hand it has the most success and enjoys the highest prestige in international fashion design, and on the other it has a well-developed support and accreditation structure, the *Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Createurs de Mode*. The Federation oversees the whole process, promoting and protecting innovation in the industry and laying down the criteria used in fashion accreditation.

These observations led to the question, if a parallel fashion designers' organization were introduced in Australia, what are the chances it would be suitable and effective?

To answer this question, interviews were conducted in Australia and in three European countries. The major systematic enquiry was based on a sample of 48 local industry people in key positions in media, commerce and education, who were encouraged to describe and evaluate the industry and to supply answers to a systematic survey document. Candour was promoted by the anonymity of the survey process.

The major outcome in terms of evaluation of the industry was that for historical and structural reasons Australian fashion design is not characterized by a high volume of original work. Consequently it is not having much impact internationally and the upper echelons are not providing the basis for downward diffusion of ideas. If the standard (French) classification were applied to Australia, the bulk of the labels would be categorized at the lower end of the scale. The informants provided a strong consensus regarding the nature of the shortfalls including the undue emphasis given to derivative design, the lack of special support for young talent and the low priority given to the synergy between art and high quality craftsmanship. There was agreement that Australian fashion designers should not focus on product just for local consumers, because fashion in clothing is not central to the minds of the average Australian as it is for example in European countries. Fashion designers might be wise to exploit the position of Australia on the edge of the Asian subcontinent and the pool of potential design talent from other countries within the Australian population. By drawing from the new aesthetics emerging in Australia's pluralistic society, designers could

easily be at the cutting edge internationally. They might showcase their work at overseas venues, although not necessarily, in the first instance, in countries like France.

Although a full-scale federation-type organization might fail for want of a solid innovative industry upon which it might be based, a limited version of such a controlling body could well succeed. Its task would be to steer new directions in education which develops a pool of creative talent through master classes which focus on understanding original design, the importance of the manual aspect in design and the mechanisms of, and rewards stemming from diffusion. Sponsorship should be granted to endeavours by a collective of such talent to showcase designs abroad. Government funds should be redirected away from the promotion of a generic product to a fashion-designing paradigm emphasizing “designer handwriting” as the value-added aspect.

In addition to exploring these issues, this dissertation provides reflections on the nature of the design process and suggests ways in which fashion design and fashion design education might move to revitalize the industry.